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The Ibibio Peace Praxis: A Discourse in African Indigenous Peace Ethos

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Abstract: *This study is an analysis of the indigenous system of peace building, peacemaking, peace enforcement and peacekeeping among the Ibibio people of Southern Nigeria, before the permeation of Western peace praxes into the study area. Data obtained for the study was collated from both primary and secondary sources; including interviews, focus group discussions and analysis of extant literatures on the Ibibio peace practices. The findings from the study reveal that the Ibibio had instituted several sources, symbolisms, instruments, agents and institutions of sustainable peacebuilding and conflict resolution prior to Western permeation of traditional Ibibio society. In addition, they had also understood and appreciated, though in different vernacular, the various peace conceptions that we recognize today – negative and positive peace, structural peace, active peace, inner peace, etc. For the most part, this indigenous pax Ibibio helped in the sustenance of peace and order in society and steady but effective resolution whenever conflict arose. The paper, therefore, derived from the Ibibio case study that indigenous peace practices in Africa have historically proven effective and that they still possess the efficacy of balancing the deficit of mainstream Western approaches in Africa today. Hence, the paper advocates a paradigm shift from peacebuilding approaches in Africa centered on Western-techniques to more indigenous approaches. This does not necessitate a total neglect of the Western methods, but a kind of hybrid formula where indigenous approaches to peacebuilding in Africa are balanced with the Western approaches and tailored according to changing circumstances for effective peacebuilding in the continent.*

Keywords: Ibibio, Indigenous, Peacebuilding, Hybrid, Pax-Ibibio.

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Introduction

Since decolonization, various cycles of conflicts ranging from military coups to civil wars, ethno-religious crises, political instability, youth restiveness, separatism, border disputes, militancy and worse, insurgency, have beset the African continent. These conflicts have truncated development in the continent, bringing afore the imperative of establishing elaborate peacebuilding strategies in the continent in order to curb them. To promote development in Africa, there is need for peace; not just negative peace, as expressed by the absence of armed conflict or some kind of détente, but peace as a milieu of justice, equity, fairness, tolerance, harmonious co-existence and participatory governance – Galtung's notion of positive peace,[1] as explicated by the Ibibio words: *emem* (calmness), *eduek* (prosperity) and *ifure* (tranquility). Contrariwise, African irenology has concentrated on Western approaches to transforming African conflicts, with a virtual neglect of indigenous peacebuilding strategies in the continent, perhaps, besides the *Ubuntu* in Southern and Central Africa, which has garnered copious literature. Consequently, outside scholars with foreign academic milieu and an "outside-in" theoretical prism have tended to dominate African peace pedagogy.

The value of indigenous approaches to peace building in Africa cannot be overstressed. Several historical case studies suffice in defense. The profuse Western-oriented efforts by the international community could not

[1] See Johan Galtung et al., *Searching for Peace: The Road to Transcend*, London, Pluto Press, 2002.

utterly resolve the South Sudan conflict until some level of traditional peacebuilding was initiated in Mundari, South Sudan. The same goes for the application of *Matooput* in the Acholi region of Northern Uganda. In Northern Somalia, after many years of violence, traditional approaches to conflict resolution provided a framework for building a sustainable peace through well-established indigenous peace institutions. In the Wungu Province of the Mamprungu Kingdom in Northern Ghana where chieftaincy disputes had went on for several years, indigenous peacebuilding methods helped restore dialogue and repair broken relationships.[2] Other often-cited cases include the *Gacaca* court in Rwanda, the *Bashingantahe* in Burundi, *Ubuntu* in Southern and Central Africa, *Kotgla* in Botswana, the Amnesia method in Mozambique, the shrine of *Tiru Sina* in Ethiopia, *Gadaa Oromo* in Ethiopia, *Ukuzidla* in South Africa and the *Dare/dale* in Zimbabwe. A 1998 World Bank-commissioned survey revealed that conformist-Western peacebuilding strategies have consistently failed to reconstruct the very 'social fabric' of war-torn societies into sustainable peace communities; hence, the import of indigenous approaches.[3]

Against the forgone background, the present paper attempts a review of the indigenous peace praxis of the Ibibio people of Southern Nigeria and, accordingly, the prospects of African indigenous peace praxes in tackling the myriad of conflicts that have beleaguered the continent and thwarted its

[2] Adbul Karim, "Exploring Indigenous Approaches to Peacebuilding: The Case of Ubuntu in South Africa", in: *Peace Studies Journal*, vol.8, no. 2, December 2015, p. 64.
[3] see N. J. Colleta, M. Cullen and J. M. Forman, *Conflict prevention and Post-conflict Reconstruction: Perspectives and Prospects. Workshop Report*, Washington, World Bank Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, 1998, p. 2.

development efforts. To be clear, Ibibio is the land and language of the people occupying mostly the palm belt in the Southern Nigeria`s Akwa Ibom State. Regarded as one of the most ancient groups in Nigeria (and as the most ancient by some authors), the Ibibio are Kwa-speaking people of the Benue-Congo group of the Niger-Congo language. With a population of about five million,[4] neighbouring countries with significant Ibibio settlements include Ghana, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. The neglect of indigenous peace building in Africa has been and will likely remain appallingly costly, in lives lost and resources strayed. If revisiting the Ibibio peace praxis can help us recalibrate our peacebuilding compass in the continent, then the voyage would have been exceedingly worth the while.

Conceptual Framework

Etymologically, the word 'peace' originates most recently from the Anglo-French and the Old French words, *pes* and *pais*, respectively, which, according to the online etymology dictionary, mean "reconciliation, silence and agreement."[5] *Pes* itself is further traced to the Latin word *pax*, connoting agreement, tranquility and harmony, among others. The word “peace” is used in several different meanings. Perhaps the trendiest (Western) view of the concept of peace is as an absence of conflict and freedom from the fear of violence, possibly deriving from the original meaning of the Greek word for

[4] Daryl Forde and G. I. Jones, (eds.), *The Ibo and the Ibibio-speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, London, International African Institute, 1950.

[5] ***, “Peace”, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, available at https://www.etymonline.com/word/peace, accessed on12th July 2017.

peace, *Irene*. This meaning is widely accepted among irenologists, especially by pacifists and it is the primary dictionary definition.

In Ibibioland, the word peace is translated as *emem.* The Ibibio understanding of peace is not restricted to the absence of violent conflicts alone or the freedom from the fear of violence, but rather *emem* connotes absence and freedom from fear of both violent and non-violent conflicts. In this regard, *emem* is often used as a gamut word, encompassing *Ifure* (tranquility), *Eduek/Uforo,* (prosperity) and *Unen* (justice and equity). Etymologically again, the word *emem* is held to come from the Ibibio root word *meem*, meaning "to calm", "to soften", "to soothe" or "to pacify".[6] Thus, peace in traditional Ibibioland was seen as both a behavioural pattern and a state of being. As a behavioural pattern, peace in Ibibioland connotes concord or harmony and passivity; as a state of being, *emem* suggests tranquility, prosperity and lack of apprehension. The Ibibio further defined a peaceful society as requiring more than the absence of war; but one with law and order, participatory governance and equilibrium of civil rights and responsibilities. In order to actualize such a peace paradigm, *peacefare* in traditional Ibibioland was waged in a bottom-top trajectory. Thus, in Ibibio peace acumen, individual or inner peace was necessary for intra-family peace, while inter-family peace transcended to inter-group and inter-national peace. The Ibibio indigenous peace praxis was therefore premeditated to curtail both physical and structural conflicts from the individual, through the family, and to the societal level.

[6] Interview with Mr. Etebong Nse, age: 72, community leader, Afaha Ibesikpo, Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 22nd January 2017.

Peace as a social contract in traditional Ibibioland was active, not passive; built through negotiation, mediation, conciliation, adjudication, arbitration, compromise and manifested through cooperative relations. The Ibibio, like other African groups, tenaciously believe in the supernatural. Hence, laws derived from sacred sanctions, which were well established in Ibibio cosmology, regulated their peace ethos. Put differently, the Ibibio indigenous notion of peace, like other African peace practices, was rooted in the Ibibio people's indigenous religion; hence, their peace culture was instilled in their oral proverbs, oaths, divination, libation, creedal formulations, symbolism and covenants.[7] The efficacy of this peace culture lay in its flexibility, elasticity and dynamism.

Unlike the mainstream (Western) peace systems, which often focus on handling the physical manifestation of conflicts, the Ibibio believed in the efficacy of addressing the latent causes of conflict, even before the conflicts actually manifested. In this regard, they prioritized preventive peacebuilding and peacemaking even when a conflict was neither anticipated nor contemplated, over post-conflict peace enforcement and peacekeeping. Peacebuilding activities in traditional Ibibioland tackled the potential causes of violence and, in addition, maximized the prospects of peaceful conflict resolution plus socio-economic and political stability. These activities were derived from an aura of historical legitimacy and served to create a society supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace, relying on the principles of preventive diplomacy, rule of law, social justice and human security.

[7] D. A. Offiong, "Conflict Resolution among the Ibibio of Nigeria", in: *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1997, pp. 2-4.

Derivations of the Ibibio Peace Praxis

The Ibibio indigenous peace culture was ingrained in several sources, including their proverbs, folklores, and religion, among others. Acknowledging proverbs (*Nke*) as a fountain of peace, the Ibibio hold that proverbs contain a rich range of thoughts, lessons and strategies for peace building. Infact, "during any negotiation for conflict resolution," noted one informant, the Ibibio "embellish their bargain with lots of proverbs about peace, justice and equity".[8] For the Ibibio, *Nke* (proverb) is a gamut expression, encompassing all kinds of oral lexis with non-literal meanings, which hold significant lessons and guide towards peaceful co-existence and general well-being. The elders relate proverbs to teach appropriate behaviour to the younger ones, thereby passing down the proverbs from one generation to another. As hinted by Esen, the bulk of Ibibio proverbs seem to have derived from the everyday human experiences of the people.[9] These proverbs, laden with indisputable clues of logical and philosophical thoughts, suggest that the early Ibibio man was a keen observer of nature and its course, able to recognize events in their cause-effect continuum. Hence derives the Ibibio popular saying *ata ayin akaneden ase atang iko ke nke ("*a bonafide son of an elderly Ibibio man constantly speaks in parables"). The following are some of the common peace conveyance proverbs in Ibibioland and their meaning:

[8] Interview with Mr. Etebong Nse , age: 72, community leader, Afaha Ibesikpo, Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 22nd January 2017.
[9]A. C. Esen, *Ibibio Profile*, Calabar, Piaco Press & Books Ltd, 1982, p. 32.

- *Awan aawan akpe ado iba omum oyoho ita* ("When two people fight, the third is a mediator.")
- *Ama emem idoho idek* ("He who loves peace is not timid.")
- *Oduok ntong ken tong ekene* ("Ashes follow him who throws it – he who starts a fight suffers the consequence.")

The above proverbs were regularly recited in homes as a form of informal tutoring and entertainment; in community squares as a means of edification; and among community leaders as a basis for law-making and interpretation. As a teaching / learning device, Ibibio proverbs conveyed lessons about social skills, community norms and customs and generally-acceptable behaviours from one generation to another. As Esen notes:

> *Their easy pleasantness is however the sweet coating of a pill. Their coating or therapeutic essence, that is to say, their didactic or moral message, lies below the outer coat of sweet sounds and exciting word-images.*[10]

Closely related to proverbs as the root for peace in traditional Ibibioland was folklore- the related verbal and non-verbal lore of the people. Through folktales, the older generation transferred lessons to the young on virtues like peace, harmony, justice, fairness, equity, truth, love, obedience and self-control. Peek and Yankah wrote: "reflecting their antiquity, migratory influences, local geography and religion, folklore among the Ibibio [wa]s bountiful, varied, colourful and profound".[11] The folklore in Ibibioland was, therefore, some sort of indigenous educational system, which took

[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 75 – 76.
[11]Philip Peek and Kwesi Yankah, *African Folkkore: An Encyclopedia*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 991.

different forms, the most common being fictive short stories with significant moral lessons attached to them.

Ibibio traditional religion, centered on worship, consultation, sacrifice, appeasement, and invocation of both the Heavenly God (*Abasi Enyong*) and the Earthly God (*Abasi Isong*) by the constitutional and religious head of the community (*Obong-Ikpaisong*-literally meaning King of the Principalities of the Earth),through various spiritual deities (*Mbukpo* or *Ndem*), also served asa veritable catalyst for peace among the people. To conform to Ukpong, "all sacrifices (in Ibibioland) [we]re directed to one or other…invisible beings and [we]re officiated by the clan head, village head or the medicine man, depending on the occasion".[12] In Ibibioland, religious rituals were usually performed even when a war was neither anticipated nor contemplated, during the course of any battle and after the cessation of hostilities between armed parties to a conflict. In a pre-war state, rituals were performed to appease the deities and ancestors, as well as supplicate for their protection and prosperity. In the event of an armed conflict, sacrifices were also made to these metaphysical beings by each party to grant them victory. After hostilities, libation and rituals were also part of the peace process and spiritual covenants were contracted by the hitherto warring groups in agreement to co-exist in peace and seek non-violent means to settle their disputes thenceforth. Shenk claims that such a covenant could recreate the broken ties and, through it, human fellowships and relationships were

[12] Justin Ukpong, "Sacrificial Worship in Ibibio Traditional Religion", in: *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. xiii, no. 3, 1983, p. 162.

ontologically established.[13] Mbiti corroborates: "covenants and rituals generate a sense of certainty and familiarity and provide continuity and unity among those who perform or attend them."[14] A good example of such a religious covenant in Ibibioland was the *Ubuk Udung Pact*, a familiar sacrificial covenant that was performed to mark the end of hostilities and spell out the terms of settlement between the hitherto warring parties.

Other derivatives of peace in traditional Ibibioland included their customs (*Edu-unam-mkpo),* laws (*Mbed)*, duties and obligations (*Utom)*, taboos (*Ibed),* as well as etiquette and manner (*Ido). Edu unam mkpo* guided the peaceful routine of events in the society, such as birth and naming, death and burial, marriages, festivals, communal farming, etc. *Mbed* were enacted rules and regulations for specific purposes like land tenure system, community sanitation, injunctions, and permits. *Utom* entailed duties to the community, duty to one's family, elders, strangers, friends and in-laws. Demureness-like salutation, gratitude, exchange of gifts, etc all fell under the purview of *Ido. Ibed,* on the other hand, were the most sacrosanct because they were associated with rituals and their contravention wrought undesirable material consequences. An example of *ibed* was the totem of certain kind of animals, like monkeys among the Itam group, and the ban ofcertain culinary practices.

[13] D. W. Shenk, *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa*, Nairobi, Uzima Press, 1983, p. 70.
[14] J. S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion,* London, SPCK, 1975, p. 126.

Instruments of the Ibibio Peace Praxis

By establishing efficient instruments for conflict resolution, enhancing a culture of peace and practicing preventive diplomacy, the Ibibio were able to resolve their disagreements and tensions amicably. Oath taking (*mbiam*), ordeal (*ukang*) the young palm frond (*ayei*), elephant tusk (*nnukeninn*), white clay (*ndom*)and even water (*moong*), among others, all served as effective instruments of peace building and social justice in traditional Ibibioland. Although these instruments are still employed in the present era, their potency has relatively eroded.

Mbiam remains one of the most antique and efficacious mechanisms of peacemaking and social justice in Ibibioland. This is corroborated by extant empirical and theoretical literatures on the Ibibio peace and social justice system. As Udofia explained, "*Mbiam*…involves several traditional rites performed with or without sacrifices to instill law and order in the society for the benefit of all inhabitants of a community irrespective of race or culture."[15] Ukpong referred to *mbiam* as any object used for personal protection for the guarding of personal property or for swearing.[16] Noah notes that it was believed to have the power of detecting culprits and punishing them accordingly, unless the curse was removed.[17] Gilman suggested that,

[15] David Udofia, "Peacebuilding Mechanisms in Akwa Ibom State Oil Bearing Communities in Nigeria", in: *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, Indiana University Press, vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, p. 110.
[16] apud Ivans Ekong, *Preaching in Context of Ethnic Violence in Nigeria: A Practical Theological Study within the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria Calabar Synod* (MTh Thesis), Stellenbosch, South Africa, Stellenbosch University, 2011, p. 212.
[17] Monday Noah, *Old Calabar: The City States and the Europeans, 1800-1885*, Uyo, Scholars Press, 1980, p. 13.

"the oath sworn and sealed with the administration of *mbiam*, would likely have included a pledge of friendship and cooperation between the participants."[18] The carnage power of "the black and bitter waters of *mbiam*", to borrow the phrase from Talbot,[19] in some cases, was not only restricted to the felon, as *mbiam* was supposedly able to decimate the whole family of the culprit and/or his/her entire community. Behrendt, Latham, and Northrup compare the *mbiam* rituals to "swearing on a holy text."[20] Thus, *mbiam* can be considered a vital Ibibio indigenous anti-transgression instrument, used for the inculcation of the culture of harmony and order in the society. Habitually, the Ibibio utilized *mbiam* as a last resort when the peace and security of the people was critically threatened. One Ibibio proverb sums the criticality of *mbiam* in the Ibibio peace praxis thus: "*mbiamami ado adueukotakpaitong*" ("by this oath, he who misses a step, loses his neck [dies]"). Uwem described an instance of the diplomatic utilization of *mbiam* as an instrument of peace between Ibibio people and British colonial authorities in the late 19th century thus:

> *In some instance, when it became obvious that only compromise could convince some indigenous people in some communities in present day Esit Eket and Nsit Ubium…Talbolt [a British diplomat] persuaded his colleagues to take the traditional oath which involved a blood covenant administered by the people. The indigenous people ensured that the traditional oath was taken*

[18]Adam Gilman, *We Put Our Heads Together: Dispute Mechanisms in 18th Century Old Calabar* (MA Thesis), University of California, Los Angeles, 2012, p. 55.
[19] Percy Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Beliefs and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe*, London, Macmillian and Co. Limited, 1923, p. 48.
[20] Stephen Behrendt, A. J. H. Latham, David Northrup (eds.), *The Diary of Antera Duke, an Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trade*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 37.

> *to guarantee the non-deployment of force in the area by the colonial authorities.*[21]

Parallel to *mbiam*, *ukang* ("ordeal"), a traditional and religious ritual used in detecting and discerning hidden secrets and exposing lawbreakers, was another valuable instrument of peace in traditional Ibibioland. Contrariwise, while *mbiam* did more of meting sanctions, especially the death penalty, *ukang*, comparable to the Western concept of truth and reconciliation commissions, was saddled with determining the truth in order to avoid injustice. *Ukang* did not just determine the truth, it also tormented the culprit until he or she confessed publicly. In a 1983 seminal volume, "Who are the Ibibio?", Udo clarified that the Ibibio had different types of *ukang*, each of which was performed in proportion to the intensity of threat perception. These included *ukang akoti* ("ordeal of beans"), *ukang nsen unen* ("ordeal of egg"), *ukang ufiop aran* ("ordeal of boiling oil"), *ukang Ikpa unam* ("ordeal of leather") and *ukang utib enyin* ("ordeal of temporary blindness").[22] One informant, Peter Bassey, stated:

> *In Ibibioland, anytime ukang was administered, injustice was virtually impossible because ukang was an eerie means of determining the truth…ukang was more effective than the modern investigative techniques. Its efficacy derived from the sacred rituals that were associated with the process of administration.*[23]

[21] Uwem Akpan, "Percy Amury Talbot and Diplomacy of Colonialism in the Calabar Province", in: *Research Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2017, pp. 1 – 2.
[22] Edet Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?*, Onitsha, Africana-Fep publishers Ltd, 1983, pp. 146-147.
[23] Interview with Elder Peter Bassey, age: 58, Clan Chairman, Oku Iboku, Itu Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 24th February 2017.

Additionally, the young palm frond (*"ayei"*) was generally accepted and recognized as an instrument of peace and conflict resolution in traditional Ibibioland. In disputes over land, *ayei*, also called *eyei*, *akpin* or *ndaam* could be placed in the land as a notice to prohibit potential trespassers until the rightful owner of the disputed land was determined. Although *ayei* is obtained from a palm tree like every other leaf, the contending parties in a conflict rarely disregarded *ayei* because of its religious implication. *Ayei* was also used as an instrument for preservation of law and order. In an interview with Mr. Itoro Umoh, it was related that *ayei* was (and is still to some extent) a very significant emblem of chieftaincy and authority in Ibibioland.[24] The potentate used it as a flag of truce to stop a feud. Some secret societies also used *ayei* to keep off non-members from where they met. Though not codified, *ayei* served as a traditional judicial and legislative instrument. What is more, *ayei* conferred immunity to the bearer. For example, during inter-village wars, other chiefs from neutral villages or village groups within the clan could send an emissary with *ayei* to call for a ceasefire. The herald could walk freely across fire lines without being harmed to hand over the *ayei* to each warring group.[25] On cessation of hostilities, the conflicting parties assembled at the boundary of their communities or on a neutral ground to settle their differences with the assistance of their clan's sovereign.

Nnuk Ennin ("elephant tusk") was another potent instrument of peace in traditional Ibibioland. It was used to stop feuds and to call for a ceasefire when a war raged between two or more communities. *Nnuk Eninn* was the

[24] Interview with Chief Itoro Umoh Ekpa, Chronicler, Ekput, Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 12th January 2017.
[25] *Ibidem.*

clan potentate's instrument for peace and was kept in his throne. Antia explained that whenever there was a dispute between two or more communities, a neutral community head or the clan head could send an emissary to blow the *nnuk ennin*, calling both parties to cease hostilities instantly, after which peace talks began immediately.[26] The warring parties seldom discounted this third-party intervention. British author, David Pratten, in his seminal work, "The Man Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria", describes the significance of the elephant tusk as an instrument of peace among the Annang (a sub-group of the Ibibio) thus:

> *The elephant tusk (nnukeninn) was a key element of the chieftaincy regalia. Its physical possession staked a claim to the office and it summoned the village to war and to peace…this tribute also acknowledged the chief's position as the paramount public peacemaker.*[27]

Ndom ("white chalk") was one more instrument of peace in traditional Ibibioland, which also doubled as an instrument of social justice. As an instrument of social justice, *ndom* was smeared on the face, neck and legs of an accused person who had been vindicated, whereas *nkang* ("charcoal") was smeared on the body of any culprit that was convicted, before his or her sentence was executed. As a symbol of peace, when a dispute arose between two communities and one party to the dispute decided to sue for peace, they sent emissaries to the other party with *ndom* rubbed all over their bodies.[28]

[26] O. R. Antia, *Akwa Ibom Cultural Heritage: Its Invasion by Western Culture and its Renaissance*, Uyo, Abbony Publishers, 2005, p. 97.
[27] David Pratten, *The Man Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, Edinburg, Edinburg University Press, 2007, p. 29.
[28] G. E. Okon, *Traditional Morality among Ibiono Ibom People of Akwa Ibom State*, Calabar, University of Calabar, 2004, p. 40.

On some occasions, a white piece of cloth was used in the stead of the white chalk.

Among the Ibibio, when the warring dyads in a conflict eventually reconciled, they were offered water to drink from the same mug as a sign of tolerance and compromise. The shared water was understood to soothe anger, reconstruct broken relationships and restore prosperity. Water was therefore another vital instrument of peace in Ibibioland. It symbolized purification and limpidness. After restoring the broken relationship between the warring dyads, there was a need for each side to purify their warriors of the bloodshed they had committed in the battlefield. Water became handy here again. Water was thrown to the rooftop and each of the warriors had to stand under the dripping water;[29] hence, the popular Ibibio proverb: *moong moong ayed idiok mkpo, idiok mkpo iyedke moong* ("only water can wash impurity, impurity cannot wash water").

Other peace instruments and symbols in traditional Ibibioland include *nnoonuung* ("life tree"), *mbritem* ("ginger lily" or "bush cane"), *mkpatat* ("ferns"; *selaginella*), the *okono* tree (*dracaena fragans*), the *oboro* plant, *nsenunen* ("egg") and *mkpok ekwong* ("snail shell").

Institutions of the Ibibio Peace Praxis

The Ibibio evolved indigenous institutions to foster mutual understanding and unity of purpose, anchored on peace building, conflict resolution and the participatory governance of society. These institutions

[29] Ekong Ekong, *Sociology of the Ibibio: A Study of Social Organization and Change,* Uyo, Modern Business Press, 2001, p. 8.

were based on social relations and guided by the principles of transparency and pragmatic dynamism. Social institutions germane to peace building in traditional Ibibioland included the family, the elders, the in-laws, grandchildren, age-grade association and professional leagues (such as the hunters' guile). The legitimacy and public responsibilities of these institutions was derived from the recognition and reverence accorded them by members of the society. Indeed, their prerogatives of position engineered positive results, which they usually propelled and orchestrated. These institutions were also adept in diplomacy; hence, in their sphere of influence, conflicts were amicably resolved, while peace and harmony flourished. Sanctions were imposed on culprits as a corrective measure to discourage a wishful act that might disrupt collective peace; and the sanctions meted were proportional to the offence committed.

The family, the smallest unit of socio-political organization in traditional Ibibioland, existed as a practical institution for familial projection and unification of means to achieve desirable positive outcomes. The Ibibio believed that peaceful families form a peaceful village and a conglomeration of peaceful villages created a peaceful clan, a collection of which formed a peaceful nation. Although customarily extended in nature based on the Ibibio lineage system, the family exhibited convivial unity at such a closed range that mutuality was enhanced. Living in an expansive compound with identifiable reasonable responsibilities, the idea of being one's brother's keeper was quite inherent in the Ibibio familial system. Not only was equitable distribution of justice encouraged but also collective responsibility for a common destiny was advanced. Conflicts of diverse nature (especially

civic ones) were resolved at the family level- in the family compound, by a panel presided over by the family head (*obong ekpuk*). Such conflicts included petty quarrels between co-wives, among the polygamous children, between wives and husbands and the likes.[30] During familial meetings, any act of discrepancies, rancour and acrimony, which might tarnish the family's *esprit de corps* was identified and dealt with.

Chieftaincy was another prominent peacebuilding institution in traditional Ibibio society. The elders and chiefs were regarded as the custodians of the values and norms of the society. They were highly reputed for their wealth of knowledge and wisdom. The people trusted and depended on their unbiased sense of judgment in the event of communal disputes. Their role in peacebuilding was therefore more judiciary than not. Collectively, the elders formed a judiciary council – the highest court in the land – called *esop isong, esop ikpaisong* or *esop mbong isong*, with whom the potentate ruled the clan. This council was vested with the responsibility of invoking the *ayei* and *mbiam* devices for the maintenance of law and order in the society.[31] In their adjudication and arbitration process, the chiefs endeavored to be very transparent and impartial. They also arranged and managed peace parleys between warring communities in the clan.

Contrariwise, far more effectual than the family and chieftaincy institutions was the role of the *ayeyin* institution in peacebuilding and peacemaking in traditional Ibibio society. *Ayeyin* is the Ibibio word for grandchild. Among the Ibibio, the offspring of a married woman

[30] Interview with Elder Peter Bassey, age: 58, Clan Chairman, Oku Iboku, Itu Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 24th February 2017.
[31] *Ibidem.*

automatically became *ayeyin* to the woman's family, kindred, lineage, village and clan, thereby entitling the grandchild to some special privileges from them.[32] To be sure, like the contemporary western diplomats, the *ayeyin* institution was practically inviolable. It was a taboo for one to harm an *ayeyin* either directly or by proxy, nor could an *ayeyin* be penalized for any crime he or she committed. The *ayeyin* bore the paraphernalia of modern-day ambassadors who can neither be tried nor sentenced by their host country. As such, the *ayeyin* institution played a significant role in the peacemaking and peacebuilding process in traditional Ibibioland. They were well-suited to mediate inter-communal disputes, especially those involving their mother's kindred or community, as was the case in the 1990s skirmishes between Mbiakong and Idu. Hence, the Ibibio popular adage that *ayeyin asebiere iko edem eka* ("the grandchild is the adjudicator in his or her mother's community"). Likewise, during armed conflict, an *ayeyin* could walk pass the middle of a crossfire without being harmed. The *ayayin* leveraged on this immunity to call for a ceasefire between two warring communities or clan. After the ceasefire, he could either act as a mediator for them or nominate a conciliator that was mutually acceptable to the warring dyads. The *ayeyin* institution, like other sacred institutions in Ibibioland, was assigned to a god known as *Abasi ayeyin* (god of *ayeyin*). It was supposed that the *Abasi ayeyin* could inflict retribution on any party – individual or group – that debased the *ayeyin* institution. The penalty ranged from paralysis to plagues and even

[32] Edet Udo, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

death. Therefore, the Ibibio greatly revered the *ayeyin* and always conformed to peace requisites of the *ayeyin* institution.

Equally, *ukod* was another institution that served to promote peace in traditional Ibibio society. *Ukod* is the Ibibio word for in-law. Like most other African societies, the Ibibio had a well-built communal kinship, consisting of a web of social relations. *Ukod* ("in-law") was prominent among such numerous social relationships. When a man married a woman from other kindred, either within or outside his own community, all the members of both kindred were automatically amalgamated in a kinship known as *ukod*. Due to the sacredness that was attached to a marriage union, the Ibibio maintained great regard for in-laws. Like *ayeyin*, an in-law could neither be harmed nor convicted. He could also walk across the line of fire in an armed conflict without being hit. This implied that the warring factions must automatically cease-fire when they sight an *ukod* waving a white flag, *akpin* or elephant tusk. Hence, the popular Ibibio axiom: *"Adue Ukod ase akpa nte unen"* ("he who harms an in-law dies like a fowl"). *Abasi ukod* ("the god of in-laws") was always there to execute the fowl-like death on the culprit. This is not to say that squabbles did not ensue among in-laws, but such rows were settled peacefully without recourse to violence. For this kind of situation, there is another maxim: *"Anwan ukod ese ewana ke ekung ubok"* ("in-laws fight using elbows [not weapons]"). In the Ibibio peace praxis, *ukod* was both an intermediary and mediator. They offered their good offices to mediate disputes involving their in-law's family, community or clan.[33] For example,

[33] J. O. Charles, "Social Relations and the 'Trinity' in the Ibibio Kinship: The Case of the Ibibio Immigrants in Akpabuyo (Efikland) Nigeria", in: *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2005, p. 346.

at the early stage of the internecine conflict between Oku Iboku and Ikot Offiong, the conciliatory role by *ukods* from both sides helped to maintain peace and suppress aggression for decades, until hostilities got out of hand following the Akwa Ibom State creation exercise of 1987. It was also common for potentates to appoint their subjects who married from other clans as emissaries or envoys to that clan. Udoh asserts; "In cases of dispute, no matter how serious, the decision of in-laws was final and immutable."[34] In the spirit of alliance, after a long conflict, it was common for the conflicting families, communities or clan to establish the *ukod* kinship by inter-marring in order to forestall any future occurrence of such conflict. In some cases, the inter marriage was contracted between the royal families of both clans.

Correspondingly, pact formations served to maintain peace among clans in traditional Ibibioand, too. Pact, treaty covenant, or alliances in Ibibio parlance were all referred to as *imaan*. In traditional Ibibioland, treaties were not codified, yet they were not breached because of the sacred rituals and oath-taking that were concomitant with such covenants. The process involved a solemn pledge, either verbal or symbolic, made by representatives (usually the sovereigns) of two or more communities or clans, as the case may be, and recognized by the parties as the prescribed act, which binds them to fulfill their own obligation of the contract. Esen described the process of treaty-making in traditional Ibibioland further:

> *…the ceremony solemnizing this bond involved, among other things, the mixing together of small quantities of blood drawn from the veins of selected*

[34] Edet Udo, *op. cit.,* p. 150.

> *representatives of the two communities in a complex series of symbolic rites ... The gods and the ancestors of both communities were called upon to watch over and enforce the observance of the oath, and to visit with calamities, dreadful disease or death any member of the community or their descendants, whoever broke the oath or defaulted in its strict observance, either openly, secretly or by proxy.*[35]

Two or more hitherto acrimonious communities or clans who have had a protracted and internecine warfare often entered into the *imaan* pact for the preservation of peace between them. A neutral third party immediately initiated the pact formation process during an armistice between the warring clans, after presenting an *ayei* to both parties in the conflict. However, the pact could not be established without the mutual consent of both parties. Although the contracting parties could have some bickering in future, they were not to raise arms against each other under any circumstance. The penalty for doing so was instant death. Pacts in traditional Ibibioland lasted forever; hence, the terms of such covenant were handed down from one generation to another through oral tradition. Pratten presents a case in point where pacts were used to avert the potential bloody escalation of a trade rivalry thus:

> *In 1859, the Bonny houses of Annie Pepple and Manilla Pepple engaged in a civil war over right to set trade "comey". Jaja, head of the Annie Pepple house was driven out of Bonny by Oku Jumbo and withdrew first to Obolo (Andoni) and was later given territory which he called Opobo…Jaja's blockade was secured both at the coast and [mainly] through hinterland pacts.*[36]

[35]A. C. Esen, *Ibibio Profile*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[36] David Pratten, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

Furthermore, the women's guild was another social institution of peace building in traditional Ibibio society. Although Ibibioland, like most African societies, was patriarchal, the role of women in peace building and conflict resolution was not undermined. The role of the women in peacebuilding was expressed through the formation and membership of women fraternities. Among such women organizations, including *Ibaan Isong, Ebre, Assian Ubo Ikpa,* and *Nyama,*[37] the *ibaan isong* was the most prominent and dreaded. The actions of most of these women guilds were often directed against the men who committed sexual violence against women, wife battering and verbal abuse of women, among others. Their sanctions ranged from public humiliation to execution. The fear of these sanctions deterred potential offenders, thereby regulating social behaviours in society. In addition, during armed conflicts between two or more communities, the women could organize themselves to sue for peace. They could sex-starve their spouses in order to influence them to seek a peaceful settlement to their conflict. If the sex starvation did not work, the women could set a date to sit-out or match across the fire lines half clad, as in the 1929 *ekong ibaan* ("women's war"). This later approach was seldom futile, as the men could not bear to see their spouses marching round the community half clad; hence, they were often forced to cease hostilities and seek peaceful settlement of the contention.

What is more, age, sex and status are social phenomena that determine identity, stratification and social relevance in African societies; Ibibioland was no exception. Age-brackets in particular made it possible for

[37] Ekong Ekong, *op. cit.,* p. 159.

people get along with their peer groups and comrades. According to Otite and Ogionwo, the age difference depends on "local needs, periodic events or on the economic or organizational necessities of the society concerned".[38] Each age-grade association in Africa thus recognized active participation, a sense of belongingness and social relevance towards community development. The age-grade association in Ibibioland was equivalent to a task force, with a special mandate to ensure the well-being and social welfare of the members thereby making them peaceful and ready to shun chaos and violence. For the most part, they carried out a significant task (whether integrative or subsidiary) geared towards propelling development, peace and harmony in the clan. The age-grade associations in traditional Ibibioland therefore played significant roles in the process of conflict resolution. They performed policing duties since they were regarded as having drills equivalent to military trainings. Such policing duties included summoning conflicting parties to the king's court for adjudication; guarding the behaviour of parties to a conflict at the scene of reconciliation and enforcing adherence to the terms of reconciliation, among others. Thus, the age-grade association, especially of the youthful sets, played considerable roles in the peace process and the actualization of reunion.

Agents of the Ibibio Peace Praxis

Among the Ibibio, the village or clan council of chiefs made laws to govern their communities. Such laws were made for the protection of the

[38] O. Otite, W. Ogionwo, *An Introduction to Sociological Studies*, Ibadan, Heinemann Education Books (Nig.) Ltd., 1994, p. 51.

lives and property of all the inhabitants, as well as the maintenance of peace and order in society. They were strictly obeyed by the subjects and rigidly enforced by law enforcement agents. The responsibility for the enforcement of laws and customs in traditional Ibibioland lay in the agency of secret societies. The word "secret" here should not be misconstrue for under-world organizations or some sort of crime syndicates; they were secret in the sense that only initiates could perform the esoteric ritual ceremonies necessary to control and placate the organizations' divinities, many of which were masqueraded. The secret societies performed peacekeeping and peace enforcement roles in Ibibioland through corporeal coercion.[39] The fear of public punishment, which the Ibibio secret societies meted out on deviants were somewhat indigenous deterrent measures for the unruly. All these measures helped in maintaining some kind of balance in society. In addition, the mystical instruments of peace in traditional Ibibioland such as *mbiam*, *ukang* and *idiong* were fundamentally controlled by the secret societies. Until today, masquerades enjoy an organic position in the Ibibio mythology. In fact, they are regarded as incognito ancestral revivifications. Concerning their peace roles, one would agree with Kalu that masquerades were "Gods as Policemen."[40] Among these "gods as policemen," the most prominent in traditional Ibibioland included the *Ekpo nyoho*, the *Ekpe* and the *Ekoon* pantheons. Others include the *Akaata*, the *Abon*, and the *Ataat*.

[39]Adam Gilman, *op. cit.*, p.43

[40] O. Kalu, "Gods as Policemen: Religion and Social Control in Igboland", in: J. K. Olupona, S. S. Nyang (eds.), *Religious Plurality in Africa. Essays in Honor of John S. Mbiti*, Berlin and New York, Mouton De Gruyter, 1993, pp. 109 - 131.

Literarily, the Ibibio term *Ekpo* means "ghost". However, in Ibibio worldview, there are three kinds of *Ekpo*: *Ukpa Ubugho Ekpo* ("ghost of the dead"), *Ekpo Ndem Isong* ("the spirit of the earth's deity") and *Ekpo Nyoho* ("masqueraded ghost"), all of which are organized around the intrinsic belief in the transcendent influence of the spirits of the ancestors over the affairs of their descendants.[41] *Ekpo Nyoho* was a remarkably dreaded earthly representative of the spirit of the earth's deity in camouflage, always dressed in awe-inducing paraphernalia and being responsible for the enforcement and execution of laws, justice and general social control. All the laws of the land were passed and enforced in the name and by the authority of *Ekpo Nyoho*. The *Ibid Ekpo* (*Ekpo* drum) was struck to announce solemn laws or prohibitions and everyone understood that contravention of the *Ibid Ekpo* attracted trial by the *Ekpo* society, which might earn the culprit a death sentence or very heavy fines. Membership of the *Ekpo Nyoho* society was open to all male adults of good character upon payment of a stipulated sum of money and fulfillment of certain other requirements. Analogously, Duerdon relates the peculiarity of the *Ekpo Nyoho* society and the sacredness attached to it thus:

> *There is a particular kind of art in Africa, which is unique to the continent and can be found nowhere else in the world. It is an art, which is especially exemplified by the mask, and the masquerade in which the mask is used.*[42]

[41] Interview with Mr. Etebong Nse, age: 72, community leader, Afaha Ibesikpo, Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, 22nd January 2017.
[42] Dennis Duerdon, *African Arts: An Introduction,* London, Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1974, p. 11.

Virtually akin to *Ekpo Nyoho* was the *Ekpe* fraternity. The *Ekpe* fraternity is named after the leopard, the most dreaded beast in Ibibioland. Historians agree that the Ibibio did not develop *Ekpe* on their own and that the Efut, living to the East of Old Calabar, are the most likely progenitors of the secret society. Behrendt, Latham, and Northrup consider that the lack of any reference to *Ekpe* in the writings of James Barbot (1698) or Alexander Horsburgh (1720) suggests the advent of the society in Old Calabar (including Ibibioland) occurred at some point in the early- to mid-18th century.[43] Unlike the *Ekpo* society which was opened to all adult males in the society irrespective of their status, membership of the *Ekpe* cult was only opened to 'free born' citizens. In addition to peace enforcement and general social control, *Ekpe* was also responsible for the investiture of a new king. High-ranking members of the *Ekpe* order formed the council of chiefs with whom the king ruled. The *Ekpe* was regarded as a mystic figurine that lives in a sacred grove (*Owok Ekpe*). The *Ekpe* fraternity was stratified into four main orders including the junior, senior, principal and supreme orders. The last two were respectively referred to as *mboko mboko* and *nyampe*. Within these orders, there were subsidiary ranks that also varied from community to community in regards to nomenclature, membership composition and roles. According to Adam Gilman, quoting Simmons:

> *The head of each branch [order], together with his fellow Nyampke grade members, enforced laws…mediated or adjudicated in disputes, led armed forces in time of war and arranged peace pacts with neighbors. The branch*

[43] Stephen Behrendt, A. J. H. Latham and David Northrup, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

> *heads and the high-ranking members were also charged with ensuring the recovery of debts and protecting the property of society members.*[44]

The *Ekoon* fraternity was another male-dominated secret service organization that acted as a peace and order enforcement agency in traditional Ibibioland. Members were required to display excellent combative skills, boldness and ability to undertake great risk. As the name implies, "*Ekoong*" connoting "war" was a cult for the brave male folks, meant for the defense of the clan. Most of the clans' renowned warriors emerged from this class of men. During the *ekoon* season, when the *ekoon* masquerade supposedly emerged from the underworld to the human world (usually from June to August), there was total composure and tranquility in the community. All forms of delinquency were highly proscribed during this period. An offender was liable to punishment, usually involving the payment of a stipulated fine. The *Ekoon* also enforced the decisions of the civil authority. *Ekoon* was usually saddled with the responsibility of collecting approved levies from individuals, as well as punishing those who refused to turn out for community labour. During its season of operation, *ekoon* could execute criminals such as murderers, sorcerers, witches and wizards. *Ekoon* also served to bring the various Ibibio villages, or clans, under a single unified authority of the fraternity, which usually disallowed the inevitable competitions between them from metamorphosing into open conflict.

[44] D. Simmons, "An Ethnographic Sketch of the Efik People", in: Daryl Ford, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar*, London, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 16; Adam Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Concluding Remarks

There is an oft-quoted statement, credited to Professor Emmanuel Ayandele of the University of Calabar, that the Lower Cross River region was an atomistic society perpetually at war with itself.[45] This declaration presents the people of the Lower Cross River region, of which the Ibibio form an integral part, as warmongers, living in a Hobbesian state of *bellum omnium contra omnes* ("war of all against all"). As with the Lower Cross River region, several other pre-colonial African societies have also suffered such indecorous comments, especially from outside scholars and colonial apologetics. Contrariwise, such remarks have been found quite untrue today, although their authors may not have been wrong in the light of the assumptions and prejudices of the time and milieu in which such comments were made. Indeed, the Ibibio, as well as other African societies, developed sophisticated peace praxes that fostered more peace than war among the people. These peace praxes were derived from societal ethos which developed into customs over time. The litheness and adaptability of these customs, which varied considerably from society to society, made them applicable to different contexts of peacebuilding. One author even detected that, "there are as many different traditional approaches to conflict

[45] Emmanuel Ayandele, *Sermon on Mount Calabar*, Public Address at University of Calabar, 1979.

transformation as there are different societies and communities with a specific history, a specific culture and specific customs".[46]

Thus far, the mainstream paradigm of Western-modeled approaches to peacebuilding; the universal assumption that the finest building blocks for a sustainable peace is the institution of liberal democracy and human rights, has been more problematic than not in Africa. Most nation states especially in Africa and the Middle East that have experimented or undergone the Western-modeled liberal peace path have ended up in unpredicted quagmires. In the light of current complexities, peace scholars and practitioners cannot afford to make such speculations anymore. The hitch with the western model, which is perhaps its greatest defect vis-à-vis African indigenous peace system, is its zero-sum award to parties in conflict. Zero sum outcomes in conflicts often tend to exacerbate antagonism among the conflicting dyads and habitually lead to the escalation of hostilities. Likewise, contrasting with indigenous approaches to peacebuilding, conventional Western approaches are not acclaimed with structural legitimacy because they often do not take cognizance of the latent psychosomatic, religious and cultural milieu of African nations during conflict resolution.

African indigenous peace praxes, on the other hand, fit situations of ungoverned, fragile, failing or failed states, a predicament that most African nations in conflict today are facing. Such heterogeneous environments seldom require a state-centric approach to peacebuilding, but a cultural and human-centric approach, which has proven effective overtime and, thus, have

[46] V. Boege, "Traditional Approaches to Conflict Transformation: Potentials and Limits", in: B. Austin, M. Fischer, H. J. Giessmann (eds.), *Advancing Conflict Transformation: The Berghof Handbook II*, Opladen/Framington Hills, Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2011, p. 437.

legitimacy in the eyes of the people, given that perceptions of legitimacy itself is a core problem in fragile and failing states.[47] Being consensus-based, African indigenous peace practices provide for the inclusion and participation of every concerned actor in the peacebuilding and conflict resolution process, thereby fostering a unanimous and satisfactory outcome.

Auspiciously, although the permeation of Western models has considerably eroded some aspects of the indigenous peace praxis in Ibibioland and in other African societies, many more aspects of these practices, such as the *mbiam*, *ayei* and *ekpo* in Ibibioland, have stood the test of time and survived up to the present date. It can then be gleaned from the Ibibio case study that indigenous peace practices in Africa have historically proven effective and pragmatic and they still have the potential of complementing the shortfall of mainstream Western approaches in Africa today. Hence, there is a need for a paradigm shift from the Western technique-centered peacebuilding approaches in Africa towards the inclusion of more indigenous approaches. Still, because of the practical challenges associated with the indigenous approaches, coupled with the institutional changes that Western influences have wrought on the African continent, some Western structures like the court systems and police force among others also become indispensable. To achieve sustainable peacebuilding in Africa, both Western and indigenous approaches must be

[47] See Zartman, I. William (ed.), *Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict 'Medicine'*, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 2000.

blended into some kind of hybrid framework for pragmatic peacebuilding acumen.

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